

Not Too Old for Something New

by Lori Lee Palmer

“Here we are, Mom. Sit tight while I get your walker out of the trunk.”

The young woman’s words dripped honey; they sounded sickeningly sweet.

What is she up to? And who is she again?

Naomi scrunched up her forehead, trying to remember. She had a hard time figuring things out these days. It was easier to go along without protesting. Whenever she asked a question, the young woman would sigh and say, “Mom, I already told you that.”

Was the young woman really her daughter? She couldn’t remember.

The car door opened, and she flinched as if awakened suddenly from a dream.

“Ok, Mom, give me your hand. Watch your head. You can straighten up now. Good job!”

Naomi shuffled along the walkway, letting the young woman lead her while chattering about the flowers, the birds, the butterflies, and who knew what else? She was always chattering. Was she nervous about something? Naomi turned her head, narrowed her eyes, and concentrated on the young woman’s face. She looked familiar, but her name wouldn’t come to mind.

When they got to the front door of the building, a woman wearing a white uniform and carrying a clipboard opened the door for them. “Hello, Pamela. Hello, Naomi. We’ve been expecting you.”

Naomi looked at the young woman’s face for confirmation. *Pamela?*

She smiled a crooked smile while nodding. “Yes, Mom, we talked about this. Freedom Square will be your new home.”

“Why do I need a new home? I don’t want to move!” Her face reddened, and spittle spewed as she spoke

“Settle down, Mom, it’s okay. We’re just visiting.” The young woman petted her hair with gentle strokes. Naomi’s breathing slowed in response to the pleasant touch.

She looked around the lobby while the young woman spoke to the nurse. She sniffed the sharp scent of cleaning products. Someone must have just mopped. She remembered keeping house for her husband and feeling

pride over a job well done. Where was he? Maybe the young woman knew.

Naomi jostled her arm and asked, “Where’s Charlie? Where’s my husband?”

The young woman’s lips drew inward and pressed into a hard line. She sighed and said, “We’ll visit Dad on Sunday, as usual.” She leaned toward the nurse and whispered with her hand blocking her mouth.

Naomi looked down at her hands on the walker. When did they get so spotted, bony and veiny? Her knuckles were knobby. Where was her wedding ring?

“Are you ready to go on a tour, Mom? Nurse Ellie wants to show us around.”

Naomi followed along slowly in her sturdy black non-slip shoes. She tried to listen to the nurse and the young woman’s conversation, but her attention wandered. Disembodied voices coming over a loudspeaker, along with uniformed people walking by and talking, distracted her. Who were all the old people sitting in wheelchairs in the hallway? Some of them looked at Naomi and nodded as if they knew her. She didn’t know them. Or did she?

“Mom, look in here. They have a large arts and crafts room.”

Naomi’s eyes lit up when she saw the easels, canvases, and paints. She hobbled over to a chair near a window and sat down. She squeezed paint out of tubes onto a palette. Taking a deep breath and inhaling the pungent smell of paint relaxed her. She closed her eyes for a moment and smiled. She picked up a paintbrush and began mixing colors.

“My mom loves painting. I hope it’s alright that she’s made herself at home.”

“Of course,” said Ellie. “We want her to feel welcome and happy here.” She turned to a nurse who was stocking art supplies. “Tyler, would you keep an eye on Naomi? I need to finish up some paperwork, and she seems to be in her element.”

Naomi looked up from her canvas when a tall, muscular young man with sun-kissed skin sat next to her. “What are you painting?” he asked.

His bright blue eyes drew her in. He had a wide, engaging smile, just like Charlie’s. She smiled in return.

I like this place. 🦋

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